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EZEQUIEL ADAMOVSKY

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# RUSSIA AS THE LAND OF COMMUNISM IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY?

## Images of tsarist Russia as a communist society in France, c. 1840-1880

Strange as it may sound, the image of a 'communist threat' coming from Russia appeared in Western Europe well before the Bolshevik revolution; indeed, well before the birth of the socialist movement in Russia.<sup>1</sup> In the 1840s and after, an important debate took place in France, in which Russia was insistently represented as the embodiment of the communist phantom that, as Karl Marx said, tormented Europe in those days.

That debate was unleashed in France by a group of Romantic and socialist authors who found in certain Slavic institutions, such as the egalitarian peasant communes or the *artel*,<sup>2</sup> an example worthy of imitation. In the nineteenth century, some quarters of the Romantic movement rejected capitalism — whose social organization was atomizing social 'community' —, liberalism — that turned individualism into a doctrine —, and the bourgeoisie — whose behavior embodied all the dangers described above. In this respect, Romanticism offered some attractive elements for socialism

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1. To my knowledge, no scholar has noted this fact before. The image of Russia as communism is conspicuously absent from the major works on the image of Russia in France in the nineteenth century. See Dieter Groh, *Russland und das Selbstverständnis Europas* (Neuwied: Hermann Luchterhand Verlag GmbH, 1961); Charles Corbet, *L'opinion française face à l'inconnue russe, à l'ère des nationalismes 1799-1894* (Paris: Didier, 1967); Michel Cadot, *La Russie dans la vie intellectuelle française 1839-1856* (Paris: Fayard, 1967); Martin Malia, *Russia under Western eyes* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999); Bruno Naarden, *Socialist Europe and Revolutionary Russia: Perception and prejudice 1848-1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

2. "Artel" was a term used in nineteenth-century Russia to refer to labour co-operatives and just about any kind of grass-roots economic association.

(which, however, originally belonged to the Enlightened tradition) as well as for conservatives seeking to re-establish order. Living in 'communion' could be the aim of both socialists and the most extreme and aristocratic right-wingers, the former looking to the future and the latter regretting the past. Thus, particularly after the Revolution of 1848, some intellectuals found in Russia a useful argument for their political purposes. According to the 'communitarian' Romantics, far from being the land of barbarism, Russia could help to regenerate Europe, leading it to its destiny or its real nature. Why was Russia fitted for such a task? Because her society was supposedly still organized around a *commune*, the peasant commune or *mir*. Thus, Russia could show Europe the way back to the *lost community* (for the conservatives) or forward to the *desired community* (for the socialists). Europeans only needed either to recover or to emulate this element that Russia still had not lost. In any case, 'Russia' was represented as a superior or better place *vis-à-vis* old and decadent Europe. Naturally, for these intellectuals, praising the Russian commune was a way of condemning the actual condition of European 'bourgeois,' individualistic and decadent society.

In this debate, the influence of foreign authors was fundamental. In fact, it was a German conservative writer, baron August von Haxthausen, that discovered the very existence of the *mir* for the European public (including the Russians). His three-volume *Studien über die inneren Zustände, das Volksleben, und insbesondere die ländlichen Einrichtungen Russlands* (1847-1852), immediately translated into French and other languages, was enormously influential. Other authors, such as the Polish Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz — who taught a course of Slavic literature at the *Collège de France* between 1840 and 1844 — the Russian socialist Aleksandr Herzen, and the German left-wing Hegelian Bruno Bauer were also influential. Among French authors, in the 1840s<sup>3</sup> the Romantic socialists Cyprien Robert and Alphonse Lèbre, and later on the anarchist Elisée Reclus, became enthusiastic supporters of the Slavic egalitarian institutions, and made extensive use of them as evidence against the liberals. The non-capitalist future, in their opinion, could be modeled in those traditional forms of social co-operation: their very existence seemed to prove that society could be organized differently. In conservative quarters, the sociologist Frédéric Le Play and other like-minded writers also praised the Russian commune, although for reasons different from those of the left-wingers. Thus, for Le Play the *mir* was an example of a patriarchal institution that could provide a model of order for the West to follow.<sup>4</sup>

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3. Before that time there is hardly any evidence showing that the Frenchmen were aware of the existence of the supposedly egalitarian Russian *mir*. Exceptionally, in his *Voyage en Russie* (Paris: Levraut, 1831, p. 86), baron Renouard de Bussière described briefly "certain democratic institutions" that he found in the "communes," such as the election of the communal chief; Adrien-César Égron's *Vie d'Alexandre I* (Paris: Denn, 1826, p. 355) portrayed "the ancient democracy of the Slavs" in similar terms; Prosper de Barante also noted the "rural republics" in his *Notes sur la Russie* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1875, p. 130 and 323), written between 1835 and 1840, but did not pay much attention to them.

4. For a detailed account of the socialist and conservative appraisals of Russian society in France, see Ezequiel Adamovsky, "Russia as a space of hope: Nineteenth-century French challenges to the liberal image of Russia," *European History Quarterly*, vol. 33(4) (2003): 411-449.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, French liberal intellectuals accepted the challenge of their rivals, and struck back. In the Russian peasant commune, an institution where some left-wingers had found a paradise of autonomy and egalitarianism, the liberals now discovered an inferno of radical democracy, communism and despotism. Thus, they started to present Russia as the socialist nightmare come true, a valuable 'piece of evidence' for political struggles at home. On the other hand, following Tocqueville's first volume of *De la démocratie en Amérique*, the parallel between the USA and Russia was reinforced, the former gradually becoming the liberal's paradise of free enterprise, private property and freedom. Thanks to Tocqueville's vigorous intervention, some of the conservative liberals finally started to accept the American model as the only way out of European social crisis, particularly after the failure of Guizot's middle-class political project.<sup>5</sup> Thus, in the second half of the century, if not before, the liberal geographical imagination completed its dramatic shift: whilst the future, civilization, freedom, and the 'good democracy' moved to the USA, the 'bad democracy' (socialism) was expelled to Russia, the land of the past, despotism, and backwardness. Despite the undeniable fact that socialism and communism as doctrine had been born (and as a movement was only strong) in what we now call 'Western Europe,' the French liberals chose to reject communism as something 'Eastern,' whilst arguing that their own land was more similar to the USA, that is, 'Western.' Thus, under Western (liberal) eyes, more than sixty years before the October Revolution, and well before any noticeable socialist movement appeared in the empire of the Tsars, Russia became the land of communism.<sup>6</sup> Let us examine now how this shift was accomplished.

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5. American society had already attracted the attention of some of the eighteenth-century *philosophes*, such as Diderot, Voltaire, Turgot and Brissot, for whom it appeared as a land of freedom, equality and tolerance. In some Rousseauian circles America was considered a paradise of rural simplicity, equality, and virtue, and, as is well known, the American political texts played a major role in the French revolution of 1789. In the first half of the nineteenth century the image of the USA as a 'space of the possible' remained potent, for both radicals and entrepreneurs and adventurers. See Durand Echeverría, *Mirage in the West: a history of the French image of American society to 1815* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957) and René Rémond, *Les États-Unis devant l'opinion française 1815-1852* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1962): 58-63. But the novelty of Tocqueville's America is that it provided an example of political *conservatism* that reconciled democracy and the liberal definition of freedom, detaching the American model from the republicans' radicalism.

6. It must be borne in mind that, before the Soviet experiment, the word "communism" had a somewhat different connotation. For that reason, the Russian "communist threat" analyzed in this work was not exactly the same as the one the West experienced later. Thus, in the twentieth century "communism" was more associated with a totalitarian state, a despotic leader and the rule of ideology, while in the nineteenth century the same word tended to be understood more as radical equality and the absence of private property. This is not to say, however, that there is a strong discontinuity between the two periods. On the contrary, as will become evident in this work, most of the later elements were also present in the nineteenth-century debates. To put it in other words, it was more a matter of different emphasis than of a different meaning.

## I. The theoretical foundations of the new French liberalism and the image of Russia: Tocqueville and Beaumont

In the famous last passage of the first volume of *De la démocratie en Amérique* (1835) Tocqueville argued that there were in his days two great nations — the Russians and the Anglo-Americans — which, although starting from different foundations, seemed to be progressing “towards the same goal”<sup>7</sup> of expansion at a quicker pace than any other nation. However, they did so on a different basis: whilst American progress rested on the free “personal interest” and the “strength and the reason of individuals” (that is, “freedom”), Russian expansion was based on the concentration of power in the hands of one man (that is, “servitude”). And he finished by predicting:

Their point of departure is different and their paths diverse; nevertheless, each seems called by some secret design of Providence one day to hold in its hands the destinies of half the world.<sup>8</sup>

Both the parallel and this prognosis had been stated before and there would not be anything particularly interesting for our purposes here, if there were not a curious paradox in Tocqueville’s statement. As is well known, Tocqueville was absolutely convinced that the advance of democracy in modern times was an undeniable and unstoppable fact. As he repeatedly argued, any political strategy aimed at preserving social privileges, absolutism or a deep social inequality was doomed to failure; the future belonged to democracy. That is why the future belonged also to a democratic society like the USA. But why would it also belong to Russia? Would not the advance of democracy quickly destroy the empire of the Tsars, based as it was on privilege, serfdom, despotism and inequality? Why did Tocqueville state that both the USA and Russia marched towards the *same* goal? He could not be just referring to Russia’s military power, for all his work is dedicated to show that governments are the product of their societies, and he explicitly included Russia in this rule.<sup>9</sup>

To resolve this seeming inconsistency, it will be argued that Russia inspired Tocqueville to conceive of the idea of a *new type of despotism* as the inevitable

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7. I generally use single quotation marks for my own text, whilst double quotation marks always denote a literal excerpt from other works.

8. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York — London: Harper & Row, 1966): 379 (quoted hereafter *Democracy*). A similar concern with the progress of Russia’s power and the threat that that posed to “our West” appears elsewhere in Tocqueville’s works and correspondence: see the seventh volume of his *Œuvres complètes* in nine vols (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1866): 326, 372, 585 and 419; also his *Souvenirs* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1893): 383.

9. In his *Souvenirs*, for example, Tocqueville argues that the power of the tsars derives not from coercion alone, but from the will and support of the Russian people, for “the principle of popular sovereignty” rules underneath any form of government, including the most oppressive (*ibid.*: 371).

outcome of extreme democracy, which he started to outline in his work. Thus, the parallel USA/Russia allowed Tocqueville to exemplify the two possibilities that awaited modern societies: either a tempered (liberal) democracy, or a despotic egalitarianism that could present itself under different facades. Let us consider now briefly Tocqueville's ideas on the new type of despotism.

As is well known, Tocqueville was mainly worried about the loss of freedom that might follow the modern tendency towards social equality and political democracy. The reason for this potential outcome was the destruction of the counterweights that checked the power of the state in the *Ancien Régime*. As he argues in *De la démocratie en Amérique*, having destroyed all those "individual powers which were able singlehanded to cope with tyranny," the government "inherited all the prerogatives snatched from families, corporations and individuals." From this, it follows that "the sometimes oppressive but often conservative strength of a small number of citizens has been succeeded by the weakness of all." In times of equality, "no man is obliged to put his powers at the disposal of another, and no one has any claim of right to substantial support from his fellow man, each is both independent and weak." This weakness makes the individual "feel the need for some outside help, which he cannot expect from any of his fellows, for they are both impotent and cold. In this extremity he naturally turns his eyes toward that huge entity which alone stands out above the universal level of abasement," that is, the state. On the other hand, every central power "loves equality and favors it," and "worships uniformity," for equality and uniformity "singularly facilitates, extends and secures its influence." Therefore, government in modern times will naturally tend to be centralized, whilst "individual independence and local liberties will always be the products of art." In this respect, America offered a model of that political art which had managed to preserve freedom in the midst of democracy. However, a new type of despotism was the constant threat to all modern (egalitarian) societies, including the USA. There were no prototypes for this new phenomenon in the past, and in *De la démocratie...* Tocqueville has to accept that he cannot find a proper name for it; the ancient ideas of "despotism" and "tyranny" do not fit, "the thing is new."<sup>10</sup> In other texts and manuscripts, Tocqueville toyed with some alternative names, such as "democratic despotism" or "administrative despotism," as different from ancient or revolutionary despotism.<sup>11</sup> In a manuscript of 1838, Tocqueville stressed the idea that "administrative despotism" is independent from the different forms of government, and that it can exist under monarchical, representative, liberal, or revolutionary institutions. In another manuscript written two years later, Tocqueville described democratic despotism as a new society in which "bureaucratic organization" would play a central role, and everything would happen "with as much order, detail and tyranny

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10. *Democracy*: 9, 648-649, 666.

11. See Jean-Claude Lamberti, *Tocqueville et les deux démocraties* (Paris: PUF, 1983): 285; James Schleifer, *The making of Tocqueville's Democracy in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980): 173-187.

as in a barracks.”<sup>12</sup> Taking this into account, it is not surprising that some scholars have considered Tocqueville as both a follower of Montesquieu and a precursor of new thought on the relationship between social equality and political power. Moreover, it has been convincingly argued that the idea of “democratic despotism” and the twentieth-century concept of “Totalitarianism” are quite similar, in that they are both based on the idea of the “loneliness” (Arendt) or atomization of the individuals in modern societies.<sup>13</sup>

Tocqueville’s idea of “democratic despotism,” together with his pioneering work on American democracy, produced a crucial transformation in the liberal tradition, by moving one step away from the doctrinaire’s intellectual and political project (which was soon to collapse under the thrust of radicalism), and thus establishing the foundations of present-day liberalism. At the core of this transformation lies the idea of the importance of ‘associations’ in modern democracies, the immediate antecedent of today’s predominant sense of the concept of ‘civil society.’ As some scholars have argued, Tocqueville’s liberalism recovers some themes of Montesquieu’s aristocratic liberalism, together with some aspects of classical political philosophy (Aristotle in particular), in a theoretical device that was aimed at enlightening the ruling élite against socialism and radicalism in general.<sup>14</sup> In his USA, Tocqueville ‘found’ the principles of his new liberalism already functioning. Thus, in order to understand Tocqueville’s image of Russia better, it is necessary to begin by a brief description of Russia’s reflected image in Tocqueville’s mirror, the USA.

According to Tocqueville, the “social state” of a nation “may itself be considered as the prime cause of most of the laws, customs, and ideas which control the nation’s behavior.” The American “social state” was, from the very beginning, quite favorable for liberal democracy. To begin with, “[m]en there are nearer equality in wealth and in mental endowments, or, in other words, more nearly equally powerful, than in any other country of the world or in any other age of recorded history.” True, this is a somewhat ambiguous element, because, as Tocqueville states in the same paragraph and elsewhere, it can easily lead to democratic despotism: “There can even be a sort of equality in the world of politics without any political freedom. A man may be the equal of all his fellows save one, who is the master of all without distinction and chooses the agents of his power

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12. Quoted in J. Schleifer, *op. cit.*: 176-180.

13. See J.-C. Lamberti, *op. cit.*: 293-311; Roger Boesche, “Tocqueville and Arendt on the novelty of modern tyranny,” in *Tocqueville’s defense of human liberty: Current essays*, edited by Peter A. Lawler and Joseph Alulis (New York: Garland, 1993): 157-175; John Marini, “Centralized administration and the ‘New Despotism,’” in *Interpreting Tocqueville’s Democracy in America*, edited by Ken Masugi (Savage: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991): 255-286; Jean-Michel Heimonet, *Tocqueville et le devenir de la démocratie: la perversion de l’idéal* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1999): 153-175.

14. See J. Marini, *art. cit.*; also Daniel Mahoney, “Tocqueville and Socialism,” in *Tocqueville’s defense of human liberty*, *op. cit.*: 177 and 182; Peter Lawler, *The restless mind: Alexis de Tocqueville on the origin and perpetuation of human liberty* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993): 11 and 102.



equally among all.” However, other aspects of the American “social state,” belonging to its “civil society” and “the world of politics,” helped to preclude that fate. Among the original elements, the presence of a propertied majority was a fundamental ingredient: “land was naturally broken up into little lots which the owner himself cultivated.” That is why the colonies “from the beginning, seemed destined to let freedom grow, not the aristocratic freedom of their motherland, but a middle-class and democratic freedom of which the world’s history had not previously provided a complete example.” Secondly, there were “no rich or poor” and “no proletarians” in America, and even today “wealth circulates there with incredible rapidity.” The importance of these two characteristics lies in that, unlike Europe, “[m]en living in such a society cannot base their beliefs on the opinions of the class to which they belong, for, one may almost say, there are no more classes, and such as do still exist are composed of such changing elements that they can never, as a body, exercise real power over their members.” The third original element is the particular social background of the majority of the emigrants who moved to America: they belonged to the European “middle classes.” Departing “from the midst of the old feudal society,” it was this social class that brought democracy “full-grown and fully armed” to America. In a very Aristotelian and Guizotean way, Tocqueville argues that the “middle class,” that propertied and “innumerable crowd” between the rich and the poor, is “the natural enemy of violent commotion” and social revolution, and “assures the stability of the social body.”<sup>15</sup>

Together with these original characteristics of the USA, Tocqueville pays particular attention to the customs, laws, and political institutions that sprang from that peculiar social state, and this because not every kind of equality leads to despotism, but only that of isolated men. “Equality” — Tocqueville argues — “puts men side by side without a common link to hold them firm. Despotism raises barriers to keep them apart.” On the contrary, liberty can be used “to combat the individualism born of equality,” as the Americans did (and Tocqueville recommends).<sup>16</sup> This is when Tocqueville introduces what for him is the most remarkable feature of American society, namely, the presence of all kinds of voluntary “associations” that defend all sorts of particular interests, and a strong tradition of local self-government. This peculiar product of American freedom

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15. *Democracy*: 43, 49-50, 473, 383, 27-28, 220, 47, 394, 33, 193-195, 611. In Tocqueville’s positive appraisal of the middle class, Guizot’s influence becomes apparent. Although Tocqueville disliked doctrinaire political attachment to the middle classes (and despised the French middle classes in general), the role of that social group in the theoretical constructs of Guizot and Tocqueville is quite similar. The doctrinaire historians in general deeply influenced Tocqueville, who attended Guizot’s famous history courses. On this issue see J.-C. Lamberti, *op. cit.*: 49-52 and 193; André Jardin, *Historia del liberalismo político, de la crisis del absolutismo a la Constitución de 1875* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1998): 372; Aurelian Craiutu, “Tocqueville and the political thought of the French doctrinaires (Guizot, Royer-Collard, Rémusat),” *History of Political Thought*, XX(3) (Autumn 1999): 456-493.

16. *Democracy*: 481-482.

serves to correct the excesses of freedom and equality, by counterbalancing the effects of the excess of individualism.<sup>17</sup>

After Tocqueville, the idea of the importance of voluntary associations — what we would now call ‘a strong civil society’ — for the good health of democracy became a central part of liberal political doctrine and even of commonsensical knowledge. For our purposes, it is important to underline now that this idea of civil society derives directly from the old Montesquieuian idea of “intermediate bodies” as the guardians of freedom against absolutism, that is, an *aristocratic* idea of freedom. Tocqueville’s contempt for popular sovereignty and his preference for the rule of “aristocratic bodies” is well known.<sup>18</sup> But he also knew that a simple return to the past was impossible. Therefore, Tocqueville devised the subtle re-establishment of a sort of aristocracy disguised under the new name of “associations.” As he openly recognized:

I am firmly convinced that one cannot found an aristocracy anew in this world, but I think that associations of plain citizens can compose very rich, influential and powerful bodies, in other words, aristocratic bodies. By this means many of the greatest political advantages of an aristocracy could be obtained without its injustices and dangers. An association, be it political, industrial, commercial, or even literary or scientific, is an educated and powerful body of citizens which cannot be twisted to any man’s will or quietly trodden down, and by defending its private interests against the encroachments of power, it saves the common liberties.<sup>19</sup>

Besides associations, Tocqueville analyzed the importance of other American social, religious, educational, juridical, and constitutional institutions. All this is well known, and we shall only stress here the fact that Tocqueville’s liberalism brought back the doctrinaire idea of political ‘capacity’ (that is, the idea that sovereignty belongs to the people, but it must only be exercised by those who are ‘capable’) under a new form, by attaching a great role to the education of the citizens. One of the American features that Tocqueville praised the most was the extension of public education, combined with the moralizing effects of religion.<sup>20</sup>

By means of this theoretical construct, Tocqueville laid the foundations of contemporary liberalism, providing that tradition with the necessary tools to face the challenge of universal suffrage. By offering a distinction between political (liberal) democracy and social democracy, Tocqueville reconciled liberalism and elitist rule with republicanism and political democracy, thus permitting, in the long run, a successful result in the struggle against socialism. In terms of historical imagination, in *De la démocratie...* Tocqueville drew the image of the society of the future, the heir of European ‘civilization’: it would be to some extent egalitarian

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17. *Ibid.*: 174-179.

18. See for example *Ibid.*: 212.

19. *Ibid.*: 671-672; see also p. 488.

20. See *Ibid.*: 38.

and democratic, but also have a certain extension of private ownership and social mobility, a large ‘middle class,’ a strong ‘civil society,’ and an educational system able to normalize public morals.

Let us go back to Tocqueville’s image of Russia. Russia was traditionally said to lack intermediate bodies and an independent nobility; similarly, in the years to come it became an almost automatic assumption that Russia lacked a strong ‘civil society’ or the proper kind of ‘associations.’ The lack of a ‘middle class’ was also a commonplace, and the same can be said of the Russian’s alleged brutality and lack of education. Tocqueville’s ideas, however, brought into focus yet another characteristic of that country, namely, its *despotically egalitarian* or even ‘socialist’ nature under the throne of the Tsar. Unlike some of the socialists and romantics mentioned above, to liberal eyes this feature was abominable. Far from being an artificial autocratic institution on top of a democratic society — as the Romantic socialists would want their contemporaries to believe — Tocqueville’s ideas allowed the public to consider the despotism of the Tsars as the natural outcome of a socially democratic society. That is why the future might also belong to Russia, and not just to the USA. Following Tocqueville’s train of thoughts, Russia could be considered the image of a future threat, and not just a remnant of the past. It is worth remembering here that Tocqueville wrote the first volume of *De la démocratie...* well before Haxthausen ‘discovered’ the Russian egalitarian peasant commune, and well before that discovery was translated into socialist terms and became widely known in France.

In this respect, Tocqueville’s later remarks on Haxthausen in his private correspondence are revealing. In a letter of 1853 Tocqueville recommends his intellectual partner, the liberal politician Gustave de Beaumont — with whom he had traveled through the USA — to read the baron’s book. The importance of that work lies (he said) in that Haxthausen presents the picture of a nation “still in the infancy [*langes*] of serfdom and communal property,” and therefore living under “institutions” that resemble, to some extent, “the spirit of the democratic and civilized times we live in.” And Tocqueville ends by saying that in Russian lower society

tout est si parfaitement uniforme dans les idées, les lois, les usages, et jusqu’aux moindres détails de l’aspect extérieur des objets. Cela me fait l’effet d’une Amérique moins les lumières et la liberté, une société démocratique à faire peur...<sup>21</sup>

Interestingly enough, Beaumont read Haxthausen’s book, and did explicitly what his friend had done implicitly — if our interpretation is correct — in *De la démocratie...*, that is, he wrote an article comparing Russia and the USA, which he published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in 1854. All the argumentation recalls Tocqueville’s ideas, and the very beginning of Beaumont’s article resembles the

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21. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Œuvres et correspondance inédites* (2 vols, Paris: Michel Lévy, 1861), II: 237; see also p. 245.

last paragraph of *De la démocratie...* Thus, Russia and the USA “seem to march side by side” in progress, the former based on the principle of “absolute power,” the latter on the “principle of liberty.” Beaumont goes on by arguing, against Haxthausen’s statements, that the “struggle of material interests” in America, far from being a problem, is the source of progress. On the contrary, the real problem for progress in Russia is the excess of rules for every aspect of life and her “terrible bureaucracy.” Beaumont goes on to criticize the “uniformity” of Russian society, out of which nothing raises itself up and the “individual disappears in a confusing mass,” like weak and impotent “atoms without a name.” In Russia “official life” replaces “the natural existence of the people,” and “equality rules” in a sad “symmetry of order.” Far from lacking the phenomenon of the proletariat, as Haxthausen had argued, in Russia *everybody* is a proletarian, and the egalitarian peasant commune, “the principle of communism on which property rests in Russia,” the dream of “our revolutionaries,” is a backward institution that obstructs progress and civilization. The possibility that this “strange democracy” may dominate “Western civilization” terrifies Beaumont.

Finally, Beaumont refutes Haxthausen’s idea that modern industry had harmed Russia. On the contrary, it is industrial development, private property, and the emergence of a “middle class” that would remedy Russia’s maladies. Catherine II and other Tsars had understood this, and tried to create such a class by decree. But the bourgeoisie only springs from natural economic development, and not from above. With the establishment of private property, Russia will foster the bourgeoisie, and with it “the enlightenment,” “rights,” “laws,” and “freedom” will come to stay in Russia.<sup>22</sup>

In conclusion, Beaumont’s description of Russia can be considered as the negative image of Tocqueville’s USA, a description that the latter would surely have agreed with, and that was tacitly outlined in his own *De la démocratie...* Both Tocqueville and Beaumont agreed that Russia was a form of democratic despotism comparable to the communist and socialist utopia, whilst the USA was an example of ‘good democracy.’ Both share a certain conception of civil society, according to which there must be something that “rises itself above” equality. Both agree that private property is one of the main differences between a society of free individuals and a “confusing mass of atoms,” and that industrial development and the “middle class” are two of the main engines of progress and the guardians of freedom. America or Russia, liberalism or communism: that was the crossroad of modern times that the liberals Tocqueville and Beaumont wanted to present to Europe in the age of democracy.

In the rest of this article, other examples of the liberal image of Russia as communism will be examined.

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22. Gustave de Beaumont, “La Russie et les États-Unis sous le rapport économique,” *Revue des Deux Mondes* (Mars 1854): 1163, 1172-1173, 1180-1182, 1173-1174, 1183.

## II. Jules Michelet: an ambiguous case?

In the first part of the *Légendes démocratiques du Nord*, written in 1851 by the prominent historian and radical republican publicist Jules Michelet, the novelty of the new image of Russia as communism becomes apparent. “The real Russia,” Michelet argues, was “unknown until 1847,” when Haxthausen discovered that “she is entirely communist.” After a description of periodical land redistribution among Russian peasants, Michelet argues that in the Russian communes the population remains “asleep” and “wasted,” as they feel aversion to the ideas of property, responsibility and work. Beneath the appearance of freedom, the commune hides a reality of oppression under the double weight of the absolute power of the state “bureaucrats” and the landlords; besides, the Russian “race” is the most “easy to terrorize” in the whole world. Finally, Michelet approvingly quotes Chaadaev’s opinions of 1836 regarding Russia’s lack of history and future.<sup>23</sup>

Up to this point, Michelet’s image of Russia displays an apparent similarity to the liberal stereotype.<sup>24</sup> However, Michelet’s contacts with Aleksandr Herzen following his first publications on Russia and Poland seem to have operated a marked shift in the French historian’s perceptions of that country. In 1855, in a letter to Herzen — whose influence over Michelet started to grow in that year in particular<sup>25</sup> — the French historian enthusiastically argues that Russia, the “interpreter between Europe and Asia,” the “youngest” member of the European family, would finally resolve “the issue of socialism.” Of all the nations, Russia has “instinctively” found a social combination that is “artificial” elsewhere; that is why a coming “oriental revolution” (that is, a “Russian revolution”) would soon clarify and unravel the problems of the West. For the real Russia (as opposed to her government) “represents the idea symmetrically opposed to that of the Western society.” Although it may seem paradoxical, the “Revolution” and “the future” could find an ally in the “ancient” institution of the Russian “commune,” where “the original molecule of the republic” rests.<sup>26</sup> In these ideas, Herzen’s influence (and Pestel’s, whom Michelet also quotes in this letter) becomes evident, together with a certain primitivism and a typically Romantic exaltation of a mythical “Orient.”

However, in later texts Michelet seems have returned to his initial opinions. Thus, in his *La France devant l’Europe* (1871) he describes Russia as “Asia bastardized by a German bureaucracy, where the two tyrannies of the Orient and of Europe are combined.” Above the now enfranchised peasant “communes” and the

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23. J. Michelet, *Légendes démocratiques du Nord* (Paris: Flammarion, n./d.): 28-40, 158-159, 108.

24. See Michel Cadot, “L’eau et la glace ou la Russie de Michelet. Deux siècles de débats sur l’alternative russe mobilité-rigidité,” *Slovo* (Paris), 17 (1996): 193-208.

25. See Oscar Haac, *Jules Michelet* (Boston: Twayne, 1982): 177n.

26. In Gabriel Monod, “Jules Michelet et Alexandre Herzen d’après leur correspondance intime (1851-1869),” *La Revue*, 3 (15/5/1907): 145-164, and (1/6/1907): 307-321, 309.

false appearance of the free local institutions (the jury, the elections, the *zemstva*<sup>27</sup>) stands the Tsar like a “socialist tyrant.” And Michelet ends his book by arguing that “the social question must [be resolved in] accord with the sacred, superior question of liberty.”<sup>28</sup>

Was this a real oscillation or ambiguity in Michelet’s perception of Russia, or should we consider the statement in his private letter as a friendly ‘concession’ to his friend Herzen, which was not meant to be taken seriously? Although the second interpretation is not impossible, this author believes that Michelet’s intellectual itinerary allows for a genuine but ephemeral enthusiasm for the Romantic-socialist image of Russia.

As Paul Viallaneix has argued in his classic study of Michelet’s thought, the historian’s Romantic heart was torn in a dichotomy between the “individual” and the “community” as the primal concern of historical evolution, which he would never finally resolve. He was too aware of the necessities of the community to believe in the primacy of the individual alone, and too committed to the liberal definition of the rights of the individual to reject them in favor of the community. True, he toyed with socialist ideas. However, although he criticized the bourgeoisie many times, he never rejected it as a legitimate part of the People; moreover, he ultimately believed in the unity of the People more than in class struggle. Thus, despite his socialistic sensitivity, he cannot be considered a socialist in the strong sense of the term. True, he was a Romantic, and he was not interested in liberal parliamentary politics (although he was close to the Republican Party, he only seems to have been attracted to the direct intervention of the People in politics). But his Romanticism was not so radical as to fully reject the primacy of the individual.<sup>29</sup> For all the possible ambiguities in his perception of Russia, Michelet’s predominant image of that country is the one he expressed in the texts that he published.<sup>30</sup>

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27. The *zemstvo* was the elective institution of local government in most districts of European Russia, established as part of the great reforms of the 1860s.

28. J. Michelet, *La France devant l'Europe* (Paris: Flammarion, n.d.): 596-598 and 618. Interestingly enough, in his *La Révolution* (3 vols, Paris: Lacroix, Verboeckhoven et cie., 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 1865), I: 108, Michelet’s friend, the prominent poet, politician and historian Edgar Quinet made use of the example of the peasant emancipation of 1861 in Russia to argue that social revolutions “have nothing to do with liberty.” Thus, a deep and radical social revolution such as Russia’s can be the work of a despot, and in turn reinforce his power.

29. Paul Viallaneix, *La Voie royale: Essai sur l'idée de Peuple dans l'œuvre de Michelet* (Paris: Flammarion, 1971): 464, 140-141, 102, 288-295, 398-405.

30. On Michelet and Eastern Europe, see Dan Berindei, “Jules Michelet et l'Europe Orientale,” *Revue d'Études Sud-Est Européennes*, XII(4) (1974): 485-498.

### III. Three examples of Russia as communism: Émile Montégut, Henri Martin, and Saint-René Taillandier

In the second half of the century, however, the liberal image of Russia as communism tended to confront the Romantic-socialist idealisation of the Russian commune in a more direct and unambiguous way.<sup>31</sup> Let us consider three examples.

Émile Montégut's article "De l'idée de monarchie universelle" (1854), later reprinted as part of his book *Libres opinions morales et historiques*, perfectly exemplifies the way in which the image of Russia was used within the liberal discourse for political purposes. A liberal writer, Montégut was a firm advocate of the primacy of the individual over society and of the rule of the bourgeoisie. In his long career as an essay writer, he wrote many articles against socialism and for the American model of society.<sup>32</sup>

"There is nothing more fatal," Montégut argues, "than a false idea of equality." If the "passion" for equality goes beyond a certain limit, then liberty is crushed and tyranny commences. An "absolute democracy" gives way to "despotism," because resistance against it is impossible when "individuals are nothing" and the "aristocratic principle" has disappeared. In this case, only two powers remain: the "popular masses" and the sovereign. This is when Russia comes to Montégut's mind as a good example, because it is in Russia that we can find a kind of equality through the "leveling" power of the sovereign. Quoting extensively from Haxthausen's book, Montégut argues that the Russian spirit "hates the individual"; moreover, in the empire of the Tsars the individual is "absorbed by the state for the sake of despotic power." And he concludes: "Russia seems to me so dangerous because her political tendencies agree with the moral dispositions of Europe [i.e., socialism, E.A.]."

Interestingly enough, Montégut extends his judgement to the whole of "Eastern Europe" [*l'Europe orientale*], a zone in which "Europe and Asia struggle." The Slavic nations "have been stopped in their normal development" because, having no "industry," they also lack "middle classes" and, therefore, their societies remain "divided" in two by an "enormous abyss" between nobles and serfs. The parallel between Russia and the USA also appears as part of the argumentation. Finally, Montégut recommends that Europe, in order to overcome the Russian menace,

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31. An exception to this rule can be found in Alfred de Courtois' *Organisation sociale de la Russie* (Paris: Dentu/Librairie Centrale, 1864): 275, in which the whole set of liberal stereotypes about Russia — lack of a "middle class" and hence lack of "civilization," a "bureaucratic hierarchy" that blocks progress, and so on — is not an obstacle for a positive appraisal of the peasant commune, on the grounds that it may perform an indispensable conservative political role in the Russian context. Similar ideas can be found in E. Jauffret's *Catherine II et son règne* (2 vols, Paris: Dentu, 1860), I: 66 and 236.

32. See A. Laborde-Milaa, *Un essayiste: Émile Montégut 1825-1895* (Paris: Escoffier, 1922) and Pierre-Alexis Muenier, *Un grand critique du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle: Émile Montégut* (Paris: Garnier, 1925).



should return to “Europe’s traditional civilization,” that is, the pre-eminence of the “rights of the individual,” which are now being weakened.<sup>33</sup>

To sum up, in Montégut’s article we find the old liberal image of Russia as lacking a “middle class” and, therefore, having a defective “civilization,” together with the new Tocquevillean image of Russia as an “absolute democracy,” the nightmare of despotic equality that socialism, in Montégut’s opinion, would bring to Europe. The absorption of the individual by the state occurs because there is no “aristocratic principle.” Thus, in Montégut’s political imagination, only the existence of a strong bourgeoisie (that is, the aristocracy of modern times) permits the existence of civilization, freedom, and even “individuals” (note that Montégut uses word “masses” to name all those people who do not belong to the aristocracy). Similarly, in his geographical imagination the political struggle between radical democracy and liberal democracy appears as a struggle between “East” and “West,” Russia and the USA being the principal representatives of each principle.

Henri Martin, prominent historian, political writer and moderate republican politician, offers another good example of the way in which the image of Russia was used for political purposes. Close to the liberals after 1848, Martin was appointed to follow Guizot in the chair of modern history at the Sorbonne. Before and after that moment, Martin published several works on French history — including a much-celebrated *Histoire de la France* in nineteen volumes — and political essays. In 1871 he was elected to the National Assembly and in 1876 to the Senate.<sup>34</sup>

His political and historiographical ideas stem from the hegemonic liberal world-view. Thus, in his account of the development of European civilization, the role of the bourgeoisie becomes pivotal.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, Martin believed that “individualism” was one of the main positive characteristics of France’s “genius,” together with “enlightenment” and “civilization.”<sup>36</sup> His political ideas are marked by a fear of radical equality, working class activism, and socialism. Thus, in his *De la France, de son génie et de ses destinées* (1847), Martin stands against “socialism” and “communism,” and argues that the notion of “liberty” is undoubtedly related to the idea of “individuality.” That is why the “passion” for “equality” should not be taken so far as to level everything, to the neglect of the “necessary diversity” of the “universal order.” On the contrary, in a typically Aristotelian way, Martin redefines “equality” as “proportionality,” thus allowing the “individualities” to grow. In terms of practical politics, Martin argues that indispensable political

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33. Émile Montégut, “De l’idée de monarchie universelle,” *Revue des Deux Mondes*, VII (Juillet-septembre 1854): 194-210.

34. Louis Mainard and Paul Buquet, *Henri Martin, sa vie, ses œuvres, son rôle* (Paris: Librairie Centrale, 1884).

35. See his chapter “Privilèges des villes, communes et bourgeoisies,” in *Le Moyen Âge et la Renaissance*, edited by Paul Lacroix & Ferdinand Seré (5 vols, Paris, 1848), I: I-IX.

36. See his *Histoire de France populaire* (7 vols, Paris: Furne-Jouvet et Cie., n./d.), I: VI.



reform should be based on the political support of the “middle class,” which, unlike the Doctrinaires, he defined as the class of the small and middle property owners and professionals, between the very wealthy and the workers. It was to this class that electoral rights should be extended.<sup>37</sup>

Henri Martin manifested his contempt for Russia and his fear of a Russian invasion in many of his political and historical works.<sup>38</sup> But it is in his *La Russie et l'Europe* (1866) that the use of the image of Russia for political purposes can be seen with particular clarity. In that work, Martin begins by defining the three principles on which European society is based, “freedom of the individual, family, and property.” On the contrary, Russia or “Eastern Europe” [*l'Europe orientale*]<sup>39</sup> are based on opposite principles, namely, a “community embodied in one person” who has an arbitrary authority over the family, the “right to property” and all “individual rights” in general. The “Muscovite spirit” is in complete opposition to the European spirit, in that “its main character is negative,” that is, it rests in the “absence” of “personality,” “variety,” “perfectibility,” “free associations,” “institutional guarantees” against central power, the feeling of “human rights,” and so on. On the contrary, Russia has an Asian or Tatar tendency to “despotic centralization” and “communism” (Martin specifically mentions the peasant commune as proof of “communism”); her government is organized in a “political system” based in “terrorism” and a “huge military-bureaucratic hierarchy.” Moreover, in their will to destroy “the nobles and the property owners,” the Tsars are ready to present themselves as the natural allies of “socialism” and, therefore, of the unenlightened European “working classes.” Naturally, the Tsar’s purpose is to gain the workers’ support so as to invade and dominate the whole of Europe. And Martin ends by arguing that, in order to defeat Russia, the workers at home should be educated, and an “European federation” and an alliance with the USA (“our daughter”) should be organized.<sup>40</sup> So, by means of the Russian example, Martin rejects radical equality and communism at home, presenting them as something “Russian” and, therefore, necessarily despotic and dangerous for human rights and freedom; in that way, Russia becomes the negative image of Martin’s own liberal ideal of Europe.

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37. H. Martin, *De la France, de son génie et de ses destinées* (Paris: Furne, 1847): 314, 33-34, 296-297.

38. *Ibid.*: 284 and 324; *id.*, *Manuel de l'instituteur pour les élections* (Paris: Pagnerre, 1848): 28; *id.*, *Pologne et Moscovie* (Paris: Furne, 1863); *id.*, *Le 24 Février: Étude sur l'Histoire de la Révolution de 1848 de Garnier-Pagès* (Paris: Furne, 1864): 104; “Préface,” in F. Smolka, *Autriche et Russie* (Paris: Amyot, 1869): V-VI.

39. Although Martin argues that the Russians are not Slavs but “Turaniens,” he uses “Russia” and “Eastern Europe” as synonyms. Indeed, Martin’s whole argumentation rests on a racist distinction between European (“Aryan”) and Asian (“Turanian”) blood.

40. H. Martin, *La Russie et l'Europe* (Paris: Fourne, Jouvet et cie., 1866): I-V, 71, 100-103, 189, 268-280 and 316; see also Michel Cadot, “Un livre injustement oublié: *La Russie et l'Europe* d’Henri Martin (1866),” in *The Slavs in the eyes of the Occident, the Occident in the eyes of the Slavs*, edited by Maria Ciesla-Korytowska (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1992): 43-50.

The same theme of the alliance between socialism at home and Russia's imagined 'Tsarist socialism' can be found in some of Saint-René Taillandier's works. A Professor of Literature, contributor to the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, and in charge of France's educational system for a short while in the 1870s, Taillandier became interested in the theme of the alliance of socialism and the Tsars in 1854, in the context of the Crimean War and apparently after he read some texts by the German left-wing Hegelian Bruno Bauer. Bauer's "abominable" idea that the destruction of the main European states by a Russian invasion was a precondition for socialism seemed to Taillandier an undeniable proof of the similarity between socialism and Russian despotism. Thus, according to Taillandier, Bauer had exposed the European historical crossroads with unusual clarity: on one side, Russian despotism "ready to level Europe" and the European socialists "who are only waiting for a signal" to attack; on the other, "the soldiers of freedom and civilization," that is, France, England and Germany. The "Russian spirit" and the "revolutionary spirit" secretly need each other; the "Tsar's despotism and the socialist despotism" are the greatest hypocrisies of the century.

According to Taillandier, this opposition stems from an historical difference between Western Europe's "Germanic-Roman society" — the "Christian," "virile" and "liberal" world in which "modern civilization" emerged — and Slavic Russia — a "mysterious" and "Oriental" nation located in Europe but alien to its principles.<sup>41</sup> By relating socialism to Russia, Taillandier was also declaring it alien to Europe's legitimate nature.

#### IV. Russia as communism in parliamentary debates

Far from being an occasional argument in some marginal political debate, the image of Russia as communism was repeatedly used in the highest political spheres, as will become apparent in the rest of this article. The parallel Russia/USA, and the fear of Panslavism and an invasion and 'Russification' of Europe are not absent from parliamentary records.<sup>42</sup> However, we shall focus here on the image of Russia as communism.

In a debate at the *Corps législatif* in 1864, mainly about a possible alliance between France and Russia and the Polish question, baron Jérôme David — supporter of Napoleon III and advocate of economic liberalism — unleashed the discussion by standing for Poland and against the alliance, because, as he argued, France and Russia belong to "two completely opposite currents of ideas." In the following speech, Charles Kolb-Bernard — a representative of the industrial interests, monarchist, and close to the Catholic conservative party of Montalembert — argued that the struggle

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41. Saint-René Taillandier, "Les Allemands en Russie et les Russes en Allemagne," *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1/8/1854): 633-691.

42. See for example the speeches by Maugin and Émile Barrault (25/6/1849), and by Falloux (14/7/1851) in France, Assemblée Nationale Législative, *Compte rendu des séances 1849-1851*, vol. 1: 314-316, 327ff.; vol. 16: 12.

between Russia and Poland was a struggle between “two principles”: on one side, “Western civilization,” “freedom,” “human dignity” and “individual property”; on the other, “the despotic, theocratic and communist ideas of the Orient.” And he added that the real aim of the supposedly “liberal” emancipation of the serfs in Russia is to “suppress serfdom in order to suppress the aristocracy,” so that the Tsar can have a “direct and absolute commandment over the people transformed into a great socialist army.” Although he was not a liberal conservative but a moderate republican, Eugène Pelletan agreed with these ideas. A friend of Lamartine’s, theoretician of the idea of Progress, and journalist before becoming a politician, Pelletan had dedicated many of his writings to combating socialism.<sup>43</sup> In his speech, he argued that Russia is not a “European nation,” and she does not belong to “modern civilization,” for

[a]ujourd’hui, en Europe, c’est la classe industrielle, pensante, commerçante, qui exerce la prépondérance ; cette classe, c’est la bourgeoisie, c’est-à-dire, l’épargne faite homme, c’est-à-dire la représentation vivante de tout le capital accumulé, c’est-à-dire la réalisation de l’égalité, non en bas dans la misère, mais en haut dans l’aisance. Eh bien, en Russie, que voyons nous ? Nul capital accumulé, déposé sur le sol par la longue alluvion de l’histoire ; pas de bourgeoisie par conséquent ; une industrie encore rudimentaire ; enfin, le commerce des nations arriérées, le commerce des matières premières. Et, quant à la propriété, vous savez quel est son régime : c’est le communisme...

Finally, the Duke de Morny stood for the alliance. An important businessman, one of the main supporters of Napoleon III, formerly an Orleanist, and responsible for the gradual ‘liberalization’ of the regime, Morny was a good friend of Russia’s and her rulers. In 1856-1857 he was ambassador in that country, and he was married to a Russian woman.<sup>44</sup> Criticizing Pelletan in a somewhat provocative speech, Morny argued that, after the emancipation of the serfs, Russia had become a “democratic country,” more so than the other European countries. As a proof of this curious statement, Morny said that the inheritance laws were more progressive in Russia than in France, and that in Russia the son of a peasant, if he becomes a civil servant, has a higher rank than the son of a noble.<sup>45</sup>

Interestingly enough, in his brochure *Le Pape et la Pologne* (1864) count Charles Montalembert, one the main political and intellectual leaders of the Catholic conservative liberals, felt the need to respond to Morny. Thus, Montalembert argued that Russia, “a corrupt and tyrannical bureaucracy,” cannot be considered a democracy. If that was the case, then Turkey should be looked upon as “the ideal of democracy,” for that country, even more than Russia, displayed a combination of “the omnipotence of the civil servants,” “equality under the

43. See Édouard Petit, *Eugène Pelletan 1813-1884* (Paris: Quillet, n./d.).

44. See Charles-Auguste-Louis-Joseph, duc de Morny, *Une ambassade en Russie (1856)* (Paris: Paul Ollendorff, 1892); also Maurice Parturier, *Morny et son temps* (Paris: Hachette 1969): 143-179.

45. France, *Le Moniteur universel*, *Journal officiel de l’Empire français* (29/1/1864): 150-152.

common servitude,” the weakness of the “individual” and the alliance between an “irresponsible crowd” and a despot. Montalembert went on to suggest that some people in Napoleon III’s government dreamt of such a bureaucratic regime. And he ended by arguing that the only kind of democracy that the Tsars’ “bureaucratic radicalism” knew, was a “rural democracy, exclusively dependent upon the Tsar, and independent of the well-to-do and enlightened citizens,” that is, “the perfection of socialism, such as that which terrified us in 1848.”<sup>46</sup>

The following year, a similar debate took place in the *Corps législatif*. Again in this case apropos Poland, Hyppolite Carnot delivered a much-acclaimed speech about Russia. An important moderate republican politician and father of Sadi Carnot (President of France in 1887), Hyppolite Carnot became a good friend of the Poles in his early days when exiled with his father in Warsaw.<sup>47</sup> In his speech, Carnot argues that Russia and Europe represent “two civilizations, antipathetic to each other.” Thus, “European civilization” rests on “the development of democratic individuality” and the “development of freedom.” On the contrary, “Asiatic civilization,” to which Russia belongs, is based on “despotism,” “bureaucracy,” “uniformity at the top, and communism at the bottom.” However, Carnot concedes that Russia may join “the great Western family,” provided she undertakes a series of “deep reforms,” which some “liberal spirits” in that country are already planning. In the following speech, Jules Favre — one of the main leaders of the moderate republicans — agreed with Carnot’s depiction of Russia.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, in contemporary parliamentary debates, the idea that Russia was communist served two aims: on one hand, to dismiss socialism and radical democracy as something Oriental or non-European; on the other, to reinforce the idea that the bourgeoisie was the indispensable ingredient of civilization, freedom, and economic development. Likewise, the idea of “bureaucracy” associated with Russia, despotism and communism served to draw the acceptable limits of state intervention in social life.

## V. Other examples

The set of interrelated ideas described above — Russia’s lack of intermediate bodies between the individual and the state, Russia as communism, the parallel Russia/USA, absorption of the individual by the state, bureaucratic rule and terror, and so on — can be found in different combinations in many other places. It can be argued that in the mid-1860s it became a commonplace in most accounts of Russian society, and more so when the Russian revolutionary movement started to grow and to be known in France.

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46. Ch. Montalembert, *Le Pape et la Pologne* (Paris: Dentu, 1864): 17-33.

47. See V. G. Sirotkin, “Lazar Karno na puti v Rossiïu (iz istorii politicheskoi emigratsii ‘Sta Dnei’),” *Frantsuzskii ezhegodnik* (1972): 193-220.

48. France, *Le Moniteur universel, Journal officiel de l’Empire français* (13/6/1865): 795-796.

The viewpoint we are discussing tended to crystallize specially after 1854 and the onset of the Crimean War. An early sketch of it (if we do not count *De la démocratie en Amérique*) can be found however in Victor Faucher's introduction to the French translation of the Russian Civil Code, published in 1841, where he argued that in Russia "the individual is entirely absorbed by the community," and society by the power of the autocrat.<sup>49</sup> Further evidence is to be found in 1847, in J.-H. Schnitzler's *Études sur l'empire des tsars*, where the author argues that "communism" is probably Russia's destiny.<sup>50</sup> In 1850, Amédée Dauger argued that the main threat that Russia poses to "Christendom" is "the false remedy that she presents for Europe's social disease."<sup>51</sup> As we already saw, Michelet 'discovered' Russia's "communism" in 1851. In 1852 Jean-Geoffroy Rohr's *Un missionnaire républicain en Russie* argued against the romantic idea of Russia as Europe's redemption. Rohr presents the story of a republican who travels to Russia because he believes that that young and vigorous nation can perform, in favor of the "new ideas," the role that the Germanic tribes had in the diffusion of the Christian faith. In Russia, he meets a "Slavophile" who argues that the Russian commune is "socialist." The traveler returns disappointed about both Russia and his ideas.<sup>52</sup>

In 1854, the year that Beaumont and Montégut published the articles discussed above, the image of Russia as communism became more common and unequivocal. Louis-Antoine Léouzon le Duc, a journalist who wrote a series of books on Russia, described the Russians in 1854 as having "an absolute lack of individualism," and neither "personal responsibility" nor "initiative." The Russians, "absorbed by the commune," are fatally predisposed to servitude; the "third estate" does not exist.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Adrien Peladan, a Catholic and Legitimist journalist, wrote the same year that in Russia "the individual is a *thing*" and the Tsar was "the worst of the socialists,"<sup>54</sup> whilst the military historian Louis Dussieux, after a description of the Russian peasant commune ("Slavic communism"), argued that a Russian invasion would impose "the fatal and stupid doctrine" of communism over Europe.<sup>55</sup>

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49. Victor Faucher, "Aperçu historique sur la législation de la Russie," in *Code civil de l'Empire de Russie* (Rennes — Paris: Blin/Joubert, 1841): V-XCVI.

50. J.-H. Schnitzler, *Études sur l'empire des tsars: Histoire intime de la Russie* (2 vols, Paris: Renouard, 1847), I: 33.

51. Amédée Dauger, "Le despotisme russe," *Le Correspondant* (25/4/1850): 93-110.

52. J.-G. Rohr, *Un missionnaire républicain en Russie* (3 vols, Paris: Amyot, 1852), I: I-III, 96; II: 268; III: 222, 412-413. Arguing against the idea of radical equality in a review article of Rohr's book the same year, the liberal politician Saint-Marc Girardin asked himself if the measures that the Tsar was planning to undertake meant "socialism." Saint-Marc Girardin, "Un missionnaire républicain en Russie," *Journal des Débats* (21/3/1852): 3; (3/4/1852): 3; (16/4/1852): 3; (5/5/1852): 3.

53. L. Léouzon le Duc, *La Russie et la civilisation européenne* (Paris: Victor Lecou, 1854): 48, 218.

54. Adrien Peladan, *La Russie au ban de l'univers et du catholicisme* (Paris — Lyon: Blanc, 1854): 47 and 108.

55. L. Dussieux, *Force et faiblesse de la Russie au point de vue militaire* (Paris: Tanera, 1854): 34.

In 1859, discussing the projects to emancipate the serfs in Russia, Alcide Grandguillot — a history teacher and journalist, close to Morny — argued that the Russian peasants were “slightly communist” and recommended the introduction of private property in land and the creation of a “middle class.”<sup>56</sup> The same year, the Legitimist writer Espérance de l'Étang introduced in his *Souvenirs et enseignements: France et Russie 1787-1859* an interesting distinction. By comparing Russia's situation on the eve of the ‘great reform’ to France in 1789, Étang draws conclusions on how to avoid a revolution in the empire of the Tsars. Quoting Tocqueville extensively, Étang argues that, unlike France's *Ancien Régime*, the centralist tradition of the Russian State should be reformed following the English model. Thus, the reform should pay special attention to “self-government” (in English in the original), and to the free “associations of the enlightened classes” in charge of the “moral direction” of the working classes. This is what France had neglected in 1789, thus fuelling the enmity of the lower and higher classes that unleashed the Revolution. And Étang goes on to argue that, despite the fact that the Russian peasant communes have elements of “a sort of self-government,” the Russian communal system is completely different from the “Western European,” in that it lacks “acquired rights” independent of the arbitrary will of the landlord or the state.<sup>57</sup> After Étang, other writers attempted similar distinctions between Tocqueville's aristocratic idea of self-government and “associations” and the Russian plebeian forms of them (the *artel* and the peasant commune).<sup>58</sup>

Charles Marchal's *Le socialisme en Russie* (1860) is another good example of the set of ideas we are following. A liberal monarchist (although not Orleanist) and Catholic political writer, Marchal had already written anti-republican and anti-socialist essays.<sup>59</sup> In *Le socialisme en Russie*, Marchal attacks the communist threat in modern times, of which Russia seems to be the vanguard. Thus, the Russian peasant communes are “communist clubs,” and the “socialist bureaucrats” in charge of the emancipation are ready to destroy all vestiges of private property and nobility. The aim of his book, as Marchal states, is the defense of “freedom” and the “individual”; that is why, according to the author, “individual property” should be defended, for that is the guarantee of freedom.<sup>60</sup> In Marchal's thought the image of

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56. A. Grandguillot, *Lettres russes: Alexandre II et l'émancipation* (Paris: Dentu, 1859): 43, 71, 157.

57. E. de l'Étang, *Souvenirs et enseignements. France et Russie 1787-1859* (Paris: Jouaust, 1859): 25-27, 52-53.

58. This distinction appears clearly expressed in the anonymous book *Études sur la question de l'abolition du servage en Russie* (Paris: Librairie Internationale de l'Office du Nord, 1859): 274 ff., which Barbier's *Dictionnaire des ouvrages anonymes* attributes to Thomas Thorner. Quoting extensively from Tocqueville, Gustave de Beaumont and Gustave de Molinari, the author argues that the Russian communes have nothing to do with Tocqueville's idea of the political importance of the local communes in the USA. On the contrary, the communal tenure of land by the Russian communes is politically noxious and unacceptable.

59. See Charles Marchal, *La famille d'Orléans* (Paris, 1848) and *Restauration* (Paris: Desloges/Jeanne, 1851).

60. Ch. Marchal, *Le socialisme en Russie* (Paris: Guiraudet, 1860): 9, 19, 24, 28, 145-146, 252, 272.

Russia as communism serves to reinforce an elitist notion of freedom and, as in the other authors commented on above, to dismiss communism as something non-European. Similar opinions can be found the same year in Leon Deluzy's *La Russie, son peuple et son armée*. According to Deluzy, Russia belongs to an "Oriental" and "backward" civilization; the Russians "live in a mass" and lack "individual freedom"; on the contrary, they have "communist tendencies of the kind that our socialists would hope for." This situation would only change when Russia develops private property and an autochthonous "bourgeoisie"; until then, the Western foreigners would continue to lead "the way to civilization."<sup>61</sup>

Other examples appeared following the Polish uprising of 1863. That year, A. Chaisés wrote that, not having the "intermediate" elements of a "bourgeoisie" or a free "aristocracy," Russia seemed like a huge "army." And referring to socialist ideas at home, he added: "Russia represents the ideal of discipline, of the workers' cities, the *ateliers nationaux*, the organisation of labour through authority, or the communism of prisons and barracks."<sup>62</sup> Similarly, the historian and republican politician Élias Regnault — good friend of the Eastern European nations, but not of the Russians<sup>63</sup> — wrote that the "Asiatic" institution of Russian society, that is, the peasant commune, was "a sort of communism" opposite to the spirit of the West and the Indo-European nations.<sup>64</sup> The same year, Charlier de Steinbach also argued that the Russians were not Indo-Europeans and that in Russia, "autocracy and communism are closely related."<sup>65</sup> Three years later, the moderate and liberal writer Charles de Mazade also argued that Russia had "radically democratic, egalitarian, half-communist instincts" that were "perfectly compatible with autocracy"; these instincts had already "penetrated into the vast bureaucracy."<sup>66</sup>

Similar themes can be found in Édouard de Talbot's furiously russophobic *L'Europe aux Européens* (1867). In that book the Russians are depicted as "Asian," barbarian, intellectually inferior, and the peasants as "communists"; the parallel Russia/USA also appears, and so does the idea that Russia lacks a "bourgeoisie"

61. Léon Deluzy [or de Luzy], *La Russie, son peuple et son armée* (Paris: Tanera, 1860): 1, 10, 45, 56.

62. Ad. Chaisés, *La question polonaise et européenne. Le congrès et Napoléon III* (Paris: Dentu, 1863): 21-22.

63. See A. Petroaie, "L'activité philo-roumaine d'Élias Regnault," *Mélanges de l'École Roumaine en France*, XI (1933): 1-45.

64. Élias Regnault, *La question européenne improprement appelée polonaise. Réponse aux objections présentées par MM. Pogodine, Schédo-Ferroti, Porochine, Schnitzler, Solowiew, etc., contre le polonisme des provinces lithuano-ruthènes et contre le non-slavisme des moscovites* (Paris: Dentu, 1863): VII, 6, 126.

65. A. Charlier de Steinbach, *La Moscovie et l'Europe: Étude historique, ethnographique et statistique* (Paris: Dentu, 1863): 4-5, 29.

66. Charles de Mazade, "La Russie sous l'Empereur Alexandre II," *Revue des Deux Mondes* (15/1/1862): 256-295; (15/6/1862): 769-803; (15/3/1866): 273-311; (1/4/1868): 725-756, and (15/5/1868): 405-438.



and sufficient urban development.<sup>67</sup> Érar de Choiseul-Gouffier's *La Russie et le panslavisme* (1870) also depicts Russia in terms of her "Oriental despotism," lack of private property, and weakness of the "third estate"; on the other hand, according to the author the plan for the emancipation of the serfs was to "level" society with principles "borrowed from the Revolution," so as to consummate a "crowned democracy."<sup>68</sup>

In his articles on Russia for the *Correspondant*, Émile Jonveaux also described a "socialist system" operating in the Russian countryside and calamitous "communist principles" in the *artel*. And he concluded that it was not from Russia that the solution for the chaos of the modern world would come, for "communism" will never be an "agent of progress."<sup>69</sup> A few years later Anatole Langlois — who also wrote several articles on the social question and socialism — argued that the "deeply democratic" and "communist" system of the Russian communes was an obstacle for the development of "individual freedom." In Russia, the "middle class" is weak, and the "bureaucracy" so large that it forms "a special social class."<sup>70</sup> Russian "agrarian communism" was also described by Ernest Lavigne in his *Introduction à l'histoire du nihilisme russe* (1880), where he argued that these principles had nothing to do with a country like France.<sup>71</sup>

## VI. Conclusions

In this article, crucial changes in the liberal tradition were related to the emergence of a certain perception of Russia. Beginning with Tocqueville, the French liberals developed new ways to think elitist politics in the age of democracy and socialism. A central part of these new ideas was the distinction between two types of equality, related in turn to two types of democracy: on one hand, radical egalitarianism and democracy as the rule of the people; on the other, equality as 'proportionality' and liberal democracy (that is, an institutional device aimed at counterbalancing not only the ruler's power, but also the sovereignty of the majorities). Thus, the liberal tradition — for which the very idea of democracy had always been alien — now offered the second pair as an acceptable option, whilst rejecting the first, on the

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67. É. de Talbot, *L'Europe aux Européens* (Paris: Librairie Internationale, 1867): 180, 197, 216, 310-312, 354.

68. E. de Choiseul-Gouffier, *La Russie et le panslavisme* (Nancy: Sordoillet et fils, 1870): 7, 11, 34-35, 46.

69. Émile Jonveaux, "La Russie nouvelle," *Le Correspondant* (25/2/1872): 679-709, and (10/3/1872): 829-855.

70. Anatole Langlois, "La Russie contemporaine," *Le Correspondant* (10/6/1877): 771-803, and (10/7/1877): 7-40.

71. E. Lavigne, *Introduction à l'histoire du nihilisme russe* (Paris: Charpentier, 1880): 27. More contemporary cases of Russia as a communist society could be provided. Of all the French journals, for example, the *Revue Britannique* is particularly rich in anonymous or non-French reports about Russia's communism (see for issues of March 1872, December 1874, November 1875, December 1876, April 1877, February 1879).



grounds that it would necessarily destroy freedom and diversity under the weight of the state. In turn, the liberals also developed the idea of the political importance of voluntary 'associations' and local self-government in liberal democracy.

These new ideas contributed to (and were accompanied by) a dramatic shift in the liberal geographical imagination. American society became more and more the model for the future, the only model that seemed to offer a way out of Europe's instability and social unrest: this reinforced the identification of Europe as part of 'the West' or a 'Western civilization.' Russia, on the other hand, was traditionally considered 'Eastern' or 'Oriental.' But the discovery of Russia's 'communist' or 'socialist' institutions offered now the chance to dismiss an undoubtedly (Western) European doctrine as something Russian and, therefore, non-European. Russia's alleged 'communism' and her undeniable despotism seemed to confirm the liberal assumption that radical equality necessarily brings uniformity, absorption of the individual by the state, lack of freedom and a disproportionate growth of 'bureaucracy.' Thus, the parallel Russia/USA acquired now the sense of a 'clash of civilizations,' in which geopolitical and national security issues were confusingly mixed with internal ideological disputes. Some of the most important French liberal thinkers, journalists and politicians of the time contributed to the making of this new image of Russia; likewise, the direct relationship between a liberal worldview and a certain perception of that country became apparent. By means of this set of representations the liberal tradition was able to confront the challenge of the socialist and romantic images of Russia as a paradise of equality and autonomy.

In sum, as a part of the political disputes and struggles for identity at home, Russia was constructed as the land of communism well before any significant communist movement or current was perceptible in that country. By placing what was undeniably a local phenomenon (communism) in a land perceived as 'other' (Russia), the French liberals were building their own identity, and rejecting the ideas of their opponents as something 'not quite like us, Europeans.' As is often the case, the image of the other reveals less about that other than about the self who perceives/constructs it.